

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

Firebreak

(Feet)

Code 394

DEFINITION

A strip of bare land or vegetation that retards fire

PURPOSES

To protect soil, water, air, plant, animal and human resources by preventing spread of wildfire or to control prescribed burns.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

All land uses where protection from wildfire is needed or prescribed burning is applied.

CRITERIA

Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent and shall consist of fire-resistant vegetation, non-flammable materials, bare ground, or a combination.

Comply with applicable laws and regulations, including the state's Best Management Practices (BMPs).

The minimum width of a firebreak shall be 15 feet or 3 times the height of the available fuel whichever is greater.

The following firebreaks are in order of preference:

1. Wheat, rye, or a cool season grass cover seeded the fall before the prescribed burn is completed.

Firebreak seedings may be established by conventional or no-till methods. Follow all

federal, state, and local regulations when using pesticides to aid establishment.

To establish a firebreak in this manner seed one of the following:

Bluegrass 5 pounds/acre
Orchardgrass 12 pounds/acre
Bromegrass 10 pounds/acre
Wheat or Rye 1 bushel/acre

or a grass/legume mixture:

Bluegrass 3 pounds/ acre **or**
Orchardgrass 10 pounds/acre **or**
Bromegrass 8 pounds/acre with one of the following legumes;

Ladino Clover ¼ pound/acre
Red Clover 2 pounds/acre
Alsike Clover 2 pounds/acre

2. A bare ground firebreak created prior to the burn by plowing and/or discing should remove all vegetation, roots, and combustible material. Evaluate the erosion hazard before installing a bare ground firebreak.

3. Mowing or discing a permanent grassy firebreak. Mowing should be done in the Fall after the wildlife nesting period the year before completing a prescribed burn.

CONSIDERATIONS

Areas planned for prescribed fire should have firebreaks on all sides. Use existing barriers such as streams, lakes, ponds, rock cliffs, roads, drainage canals, railroads, utility right-of-way, and cultivated land as natural firebreaks.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Locate firebreaks on the contour, where possible, to minimize the risk of soil erosion.

Attempt to locate firebreaks near ridge crests and valley bottoms. If winds are predictable, firebreaks should be located perpendicular to the wind and on the windward side of the area to be protected.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Mow or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of dead litter and to control

weeds. Prior to a prescribed burn, all permanent vegetative firebreaks should be free of grass clippings and combustible material.

Inspect annually and rework erosion control measures as necessary to ensure proper function.

Control access to the firebreak to prevent damage by vehicles and people.

Inspect annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary to keep them void of flammable vegetation. Re-seed bare ground firebreaks if necessary to control erosion.

Inspect for and remove woody materials such as dead limbs and blown down trees from firebreak.